



“It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians.” *Dietrich Bonhoeffer—prior to being martyred by the Nazis for his resistance to Hitler.*

I wonder how many of us had experienced prolonged isolation from other Christians, at least from those beyond our most central family orbit, prior to March, 2020?

I have a fairly positive outlook on life. I think it’s possible to appreciate life without anticipating death, to admire light without experiencing darkness, to recognize the nobility of good even without the challenge of evil. I believe we can enjoy building up without participating in tearing down. I propose that we can value laughing, dancing, embracing, speaking, loving, and peace without intimate knowledge of weeping, mourning, refraining from embracing (think masks and fist bumps), silence, hatred, and war (Eccles 3:1-9). However, there does seem to be a depth of appreciation that comes uniquely with contrasting opposites on the spectrum of life’s experiences.

If I could ask everyone to describe 2020 with one word, more often than not that word would have a negative connotation. For Bentonville Church of Christ, numbers will never tell the whole story. But numbers are indicative of where we are as a local church in response to and recovery from pandemic. Our attendance is around 500+ now on Sunday mornings...and growing! That’s around 300 shy of the 800+ we averaged pre-covid: March 21-315; March 28-434; April 4-729 (3 Easter services); April 11-449; April 18-535. Compared to where we’ve been the last many months, this is good news! We are gradually being restored...or perhaps a better way of saying it is re-established.

Over the past year we have all likely gained depth in our appreciation of fellowship. We recognize more fully that we need each other. Humans are designed to embrace community. Look at this small sampling of “one another” scriptures:

*Scriptures which point out relationship in the Lord’s body, his church:

ASSEMBLY with one another (Mt 18:20; 1 Cor 11:18ff)

CONCERN for one another (Ro 12:15; 1 Cor 12:25f; Gal 6:2)

CORRECTION of one another (Mt 18:15-17; Ro 15:14)

DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS in the body (Ro 12:4-8; Eph 4:7)

ENCOURAGING one another (Ac 14:21f; Ro 14:19)

EXAMPLE to one another (1 Thess 1:6f; Titus 2:7)

FAMILY RELATIONSHIP with one another (Lk 8:19-21; Jn 20:17)

FELLOWSHIP with one another (Ac 2:42; 1 Jn 1:3)

GENTLENESS with one another (Col 3:12; Ja 3:13)

GREETING one another (Phil 4:21f; Tit 3:15)

HONORING one another (Ro 12:10; Phil 2:3)

HOSPITALITY to one another (Ro 12:13; 1 Pe 4:9)

HUMILITY toward one another (Mt 18:2-4; Jn 13:14-17)

JUDGING RIGHTLY one another’s words and lives (Ro 16:17; Col 2:8)

LEADING one another (Mk 10:42f; 1 Cor 16:15f)

LOVE for one another (Jn 13:34f; Ro 12:10)

PEACE with one another (Mt 5:23f; Ro 14:19)

PRAYING with and for one another (Eph 6:18; Ja 5:16)

REJECTING WRONG in one another’s words and lives (1 Cor 5:1-13; Tit 3:9-11)

REPORTING NEWS to one another (Phil 1:27; 1 Thess 1:8f)

SERVING one another (Lu 6:38; Jn 13:14-17)
SPEAKING RIGHTLY to one another (Mt 12:34f; Eph 4:15)
TEACHING one another (Mt 28:20; Ac 20:20)
UNITY with one another (Ro 15:7; Jn 17:11, 20-23)

Wow. Being together is serious with the Lord. That brings us to **Reconnected**, a timely and simple HomePointe campaign to help us capture momentum and build toward reestablishment. Our HP team is challenging each single member and family unit in attendance today to take a packet of stationary, stamps, and envelopes with names and addresses for three others enclosed. We are asking your family to personally write (in your own handwriting) to these three families (plus one of your own choosing) words of encouragement...to speak "life" in a personal way into the lives of your brothers and sisters. We also want to help equip all for the task. We are providing templates of encouraging words to help prod us and provoke us to love and good works ☺. We are eager to help us reconnect with one another. We may be writing to three families we do not know. It doesn't matter. Our resources will help! We can all say something of how much the Lord's people mean to us.

Would you like to see a fun example of an encouraging note?

LET'S RECONNECT by Ivan and Marcia Lassiter
*Missing your smiles, your handshakes, and friendly embraces;
Loving the sparkle in your eyes, despite the masks on your faces.
Exchanging encouraging words, as we take time to speak;
Just a small part of the joy, that is shared each and every week.
The manifestation of the Spirit, is given to each one for the profit of all;
So let us share our spiritual gifts, so the work of the Church doesn't stall.
To say these are traumatic times, would be to say the least;
Loving our neighbors and our brethren, is something that must never cease.
As individual members, let us unite in Christ's body, to be correct;
And let us come together, reacquaint, and take time to reconnect.*

Out of concern for one another, we have shared distancing. Out of deep love, now let's share encouragement. For some, it may not yet be time to be part of the public assembly. My family knows what it's like to experience a special circumstance. But hopefully we're all experiencing the anticipation of moving toward recovery and reestablishment. And even if you or someone you know is not ready to be here in person, we can share the bond of words of hope and caring.

Please take at least one packet this morning, May 2. Send your letters by May 16. That gives everyone two weeks. Each of us will have a unique set of names. Those people didn't know it when they arrived this morning, but they are depending on us to fulfill our part of the letter-writing campaign. A few months ago, you were given a tree to plant to mark a line in the sand...a planting of hope. Now we are asking you to give...something simple...but something real...to help us be **Reconnected** as a family. Thank you for doing your part ☺.



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